

Lesson 5

Finding Jesus as Our Open Door to Heaven Genesis 28:10-22

Defining Heaven

The Bible gives us some pretty fascinating glimpses into Heaven. We read about angels and architecture, worship and warfare, thrones and Deity. In this study, Jacob's encounter with God at Bethel has some beautiful insights for us. For the first time since Genesis 1 we get to peer behind the curtain and see the activity of Heaven toward earth. Let's explore some of what the Scripture says about this magnificent place.

Because the Apostle Paul talks about being caught up into the third heaven (See, 2 Corinthians 12:2) most theologians conclude that the Scripture reveals at least three heavens. The third heaven is the heaven where God exist; the second heaven, where angels and demons exist; and the first heaven, the starry atmosphere around our planet and our heads. Part of our existence is in the first heaven. Here we operate in the natural, physical, and material world with our five senses. In the physical realm we are aware of two physical characteristics: time and space. Time is linear, moving only forward. Space has three dimensions: height, depth and breadth. Time and space have both limited and infinite characteristics. This is the world God created for us. The full effects of the fall of man on time and space is uncertain, but we are certain that God transcends both. I struggle with the thought that God is outside of time and am more comfortable believing that both time is inside of God's kingdom. Another example of what is difficult to grasp is the concept of eternity. Eternity transcends time but we usually describe it with the time-oriented term--everlasting. I have a suspicion that eternity has more dimensions than we can imagine. But we are left to try to describe it in limited natural terms.

In his experience in the third heaven the Apostle Paul refers to things that were "inexpressible" and "unlawful" for him to discuss (See 2 Corinthians 12:4). All that exist in the second and third heavens can only be described by language and knowledge that is familiar to us who live in the first heaven. Imagine having a conversation about a smart phone with a person living in the 1600's? There would be no language for it; no connection with their reality. You would only be able to speak abstractly and use what was current to them to describe it.

In the same way, human language can only abstractly illustrate things that exist in heavenly realms. When Jacob saw a ladder that was an image that he could relate to. It conveyed a truth about what happens where the presence of the Lord is. His knowledge base was, like ours, is limited—unless we invite the Holy Spirit to reveal it to us.

1Corinthians 2:9

But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

I think we have the capacity to know things that "pass understanding." But, in order to get to that place we have to be willing to give up our right to understand and to have everything always make perfect since.

Deceptive Measures

In our story, Isaac was old and wanted to bless his firstborn son, Esau, before he died. Esau was a hunter, so he prepared a meal for his father after which he would receive Isaac's blessing. Isaac's wife, Rebekah, loved Jacob and set up a scheme for him to steal the blessing of the first-born from his blind father.

The scheme was successful, Esau was furious, and Jacob fled to Padan Aram in fear for his life. Here he was, emotionally stressed, fleeing for his life. He had deceived his father and his brother and now possessed a stolen birthright. He is separated from his family and headed to a strange land. He stops that evening to make camp for the night. While he was sleeping he had a vision of a stairway leading to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it. He awoke convinced that God was in that place. He called that place Bethel, "house of God" because he had had a divine encounter.

Jesus Our Door to the Heavenlies

Centuries later Jesus was calling His disciples, and, as He invited Nathaniel, He told him that he would see heaven and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (See, John 1:51). Every Jew realized that He was referring to the story of Jacob's dream. This is an amazing declaration. Jesus was telling Nathaniel that He is the door that leads to having encounters with God. He is the connecting point between heaven and earth. Even though Jacob was running from his fears and carrying some heavy baggage. It was eclipsed by one encounter with God at Bethel. God is willing to meet with us regardless of the circumstances we are facing. An encounter with Jesus has the power to establish a God perspective for your life and a fresh new direction.

Jesus is also the open door that gives access to angelic beings as they descend to their heavenly assignments and then, upon completion, receives them as they ascend back to the heavenlies. Angels are dispatched to assist believers in their earthly assignments (See, Hebrews 1:14; Daniel 10:12-13). According to Jesus, a personal angel is assigned to every person (See, Matthew 18:10). Finding Jesus in this story gives new light to the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10).

GROUP QUESTIONS:

If Jacob's ladder is a well-known **encounter with God**, and Jesus referred to Himself as that **ladder**, seeing that He never leaves us nor forsakes us, should we anticipate and expect more encounters?

What can we do to position ourselves for more encounters?

How do you think God responds to our asking Him to increase encounters with Him?